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# ♦THE♦OLD♦TESTAMENT♦STUDENT.♦

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POINTS of view are often determining factors in historical interpretation. This fact should always be remembered in connection with the study of the Old Testament. What then are the points of view to be taken? Are we to criticise and investigate the narratives concerning Israel simply from the point of view of their likeness to the traditions of other peoples? This resemblance, indeed, cannot be ignored; for to do that would be both superficial and unscientific. Does it not seem necessary that biblical history be analyzed and dissected in the same critical way in which all other history is treated? But there is also another point of view which must not be overlooked. That is the one derived from the culmination of Israel's history in Jesus Christ and his church; and, above all, from the historic fact of the resurrection of the Christ. The Old Testament records of divine manifestations cannot be properly and scientifically investigated except from the point of view of the resurrection of the Christ.

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IT is interesting to look back upon the thoughts and labors of those who have contributed to the elevation of biblical studies in the church and to the present high standard of attainment which is maintained with few exceptions in our country. Among such scholars and teachers was Prof. Bela B. Edwards, whose too brief career, cut off in its prime, gave promise of large service to the cause of Old Testament study. In his inaugural address as professor of Hebrew at Andover in 1838, he elaborated some reasons for the study of Hebrew, which may well be considered to-day. They are as follows:

1) An argument for the study of Hebrew may be derived from the fact that great eminence in the pursuit, on the part of a few individuals, cannot be expected in the absence of a general cultivation of the language.

2) We will be better prepared to take all proper advantage of the immense stores of erudition on the general subject which have been collected in Germany.

- 3) It strengthens the faith of the student in the genuineness and divine authority of the Scriptures.
- 4) It influences the imagination and the taste.
- 5) It has an important bearing upon the missionary enterprise in the training of translators.
- 6) It throws light on the systems of Christian theology.
- 7) It counteracts the present increasing tendency in some portions of the church to undervalue the Old Testament and to degrade it from any connection with the New.

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EXCEPTION is not infrequently taken to works on the Bible that lay emphasis upon the part of man in its production. The charge against such a representation seems to be that it designedly minimizes the divine element in the Scriptures. Is this objection valid? Will it not be granted that there is almost insuperable difficulty in drawing the exact line between the divine and the human elements in the Bible, just as is the case in analyzing the person of Christ? It would at least seem to be fair to assume that, as far as the Bible can be reasonably explained as the product of man's genius, this explanation must be allowed. Regarding all such elements as the product of the human mind, the determination of the divine element is simplified. It is found in the residuum which cannot be attributed to man. We confidently affirm that there is such a residuum which stamps the Scripture as an authoritative rule of faith and practice. No doubt the part of man in producing the Bible may be and is sometimes over-estimated. On the other hand, one may err in magnifying the divine element. It is a question whether certain schools of theological thought have not done this. If the former extreme is dangerous, may not this latter error tend to hinder a clear understanding of Scripture and to prevent it from having its true and rightful position of influence in the world?

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THE study of ancient religions is not only a fascinating work. It is full of instruction by way of resemblance and contrast with the religion of Judaism. While in Israel men confidently expected deliverance, in the other nations they were driven by failure and despair to desire ardently the same blessing and to seek for it. What God revealed in a unique and positive manner to his ancient chosen people, was, it might almost be said, forced out of less favored races by the anguish of their hopelessness. Those truths which were written in light for the one, were by the others dimly discerned in darkness through their experiences of want. In the midst of such diversity,

how remarkably similar are the ultimate issues in all these early civilizations. Redemption is the key-note, the far-off harmony, to which all respond. Preparation, in the one case through progress, but through relapse and decline in the other—still preparation, all the while, for the consummation of this redemption, is the underlying principle which rules the course of events. Thus all this ancient life, whether in Israel or in Assyria and Egypt, becomes instinct with divine forces and full of divine significance.

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BOOKS upon biblical topics occupy no insignificant place in the mass of literature which presents itself for examination before Christian ministers and students. That this is so is an encouraging fact. But it is practically very important to inquire also as to the characteristics and methods which such books reveal. Are we improving upon our forefathers? They produced a massive, stalwart biblical literature, which demanded study and meditation. A vigorous effort was indispensable for the mastery of the works they furnished for their day. We live, on the contrary, in the era of clearness, simplicity and brevity. Commentaries are compact and concise. Sermons are pithy. The primer is the favorite form of publication.

In relation to the Bible a gratifying progress has also been made in methods. Not only do exegetical works find a ready sale; they are themselves more scientific and systematic. Attention is also being paid to the separate books of Scripture; their contents are expounded and their teachings formulated. Bible characters are studied in the light of their times. A flood of radiance is poured upon the histories, prophecies and epistles from the habits and customs of the ages in which they were first produced. But in close relation to this movement is another tendency. Homiletical helps are very popular. So-called aids to preachers in their preparation for the pulpit and to teachers for their study of the Bible are appearing on all sides. The great danger in thus multiplying material which would lighten the difficulties and remove the hindrances in the way of the Bible-teacher is that it will tend to destroy individual effort.

This is a deplorable result. Our students must be masters of their helps, or these will crush them. The Scriptures invite and demand individual study. No amount of expository literature however valuable can supply the place of it. The choice between books relating to the Scriptures must be determined by this rule—Do they stimulate or do they take the place of personal study? Have no book which will not help to do better and more effective *work* on the Bible.